



This picture is by Stewart B Johnson and it's called "The Last Supper, Glasgow"

I first saw this picture, or one like it, on the wall of an old miners' social hall in Roslin, Midlothian. I was sitting round a table with a couple of vagrants and two monks, in a cold and steamy room, eating supper, looking at a picture of people eating supper, and thinking of the last supper. And now every Maundy Thursday I think of those three meals, overlaid on each other, the one in Palestine in the middle of heat and fear, and this one, and the one I was eating there in Roslin, scratching myself because of the fleas but glad to be there because I was in a place where people knew how to be close to God.

I wasn't at the last supper, and I was in Roslin many years ago, and so this picture is the only one of those suppers I can bring to show you. But it echoes the other suppers, and for you it will echo other suppers still that you will have shared, or wanted to share.

There they are, a group of people in a pub, a pretty mixed group, most of them are what the Americans would call blue-collar workers but there's a guy too in a bowler hat, and a trendy guy in his dark glasses, and on the left in the corner a guy all in black on the telephone. And a very anxious guy on the right. And I think that person in the middle outside the window is a woman. And to be honest they all look pretty tired, the same as I did when I ate my supper and looked at the picture, because I had travelled up from London that day, on a train and on a bus, so I could catch fleas and sit with people and look at this picture and somehow receive a vision of God.

At the time I was a University Chaplain and trying to find my way as a Christian and a priest, and I had heard of a guy in Scotland who himself had been a University chaplain and who had given it all up to become poor and had founded a community there in Midlothian, his name was Roland, he's dead now.

In the Lent Lectures I told the story of Roland's call to Midlothian, how he was longing to know God's will for his life and so he prayed, "God, all I want to know is what to do but you will need to make it clear, I'll do whatever you want but it needs to be clear"

– a very dangerous prayer, by the way –

and he prayed it on a train going back South from Midlothian and the train stopped in Leeds station, and as Roland was sitting there in the carriage praying his prayer a goods train passed him in the station, a long train carrying no goods, and at the back a guard's van and on the van a poster and it said, "Return empty to Scotland".

So on the basis of that Roland left his Chaplaincy and went to Roslin and founded there the Community of the Transfiguration, only ever two or three people at any one time, and stayed there for decades, teaching in the university in Edinburgh and going home to Roslin where he and his friends had a series of huts in the garden of the miners' centre where they lived, and a slightly larger hut where they prayed, and the miners' centre itself where they ate and offered hospitality, and this picture or one like it was on the wall.

They offered hospitality to people like me who went to learn about God, and to people of the road who needed a bed for the night, and all the guests slept close by each other in a sort of partitioned dormitory, that's why you got fleas.

And when I was there I went for walks with Roland, and as we talked he gave me a word by which to live my life, but that's another story. Tonight's story is the story of these three suppers.

In another context Roland said this:

The Christian life is built around this lonely man, Jesus, who failed completely.

Who failed completely? He who was the Son of God and raised from the dead, and who by His Spirit founded the largest faith community the world has ever seen?

Yes. The Christian life is built around this lonely man, Jesus, who failed completely.

Tonight we remember the complete failure of Jesus, and together we enact the salvation of the world that flowed from his failure, since it is by his wounds that we have been healed.

I have spoken many times of the open table of the poor Christ, and how He calls us to extend that table into every street and into every home where people will welcome Him, and how he sits beside you wherever you are and offers you food and asks you to share it with others. That table was first laid here, on this night; the table of the lonely man, Jesus, who failed completely.

And it was from this table that he rose and took his jacket off and put a towel round his waist and washed the feet of his friends, and to this day he makes friends of anyone who wants to sit with him, and he washes their feet.

In his meditations on St John's Gospel the great Methodist theologian Gordon Wakefield tells the story of a man who dreams he's in heaven and there in heaven there's a museum and one of the angels shows him round. And in his dream the guy sees some nails, and a cup and a plate, things like that, and then he says to the angel, Isn't there a towel here too, and a bowl? And the angel says, Oh no, we don't keep those things here. You see, here, the towel and the bowl are in constant use.

For St John it is the washing of feet that is the great sacrament, as we heard in the Gospel a few moments ago. And the promise we have is that the risen Jesus will serve us and wash us clean until the end of time. And that promise was made on this night.

And later on this night Jesus was betrayed by a friend, and was taken by the authorities, and his friends forsook him and fled, and he was all alone, and his friend denied him, and he was mocked and reviled and humiliated and killed, Jesus, this lonely man who failed completely. And by his wounds we have been healed.

So in the picture you see these tired people, from their tribes and clubs, you see the guy with a Rangers scarf and the guy with a Celtic scarf, the trendy guy with dark glasses and

Judas on the phone, you see them in their brokenness, and in the middle Jesus breaking the bread that reconciles the world to God's self and takes away all fear.

And today in little, hidden places like Roslin, and in the streets and homes of Liverpool Diocese, men and women who have eaten this bread, men and women with freshly cleaned feet, are still laying the table and getting out the towel, and in the name of Jesus reconciling people and making all things new.

And it started here, and it never ends until time ends. The Jesus movement, the Jesus revolution, the Jesus choice.

So what will you choose? Will you choose him today? Will you eat and wash and be clean? Will you let him sit beside you so that your table too can be the table of the poor Christ? Will your picture too be overlaid on this one, and on the hot, fearful one where all this began?

I hope so. I hope I will choose him also. The world needs him still, this gilded world of iPhones and freely chosen selfishness, of people dying in their riches and ignored in their poverty; we need this lonely man, Jesus, who failed completely and who saved us all. We need you again, Lord. We choose you today. Wash us again, and feed us again, we pray.
Amen.